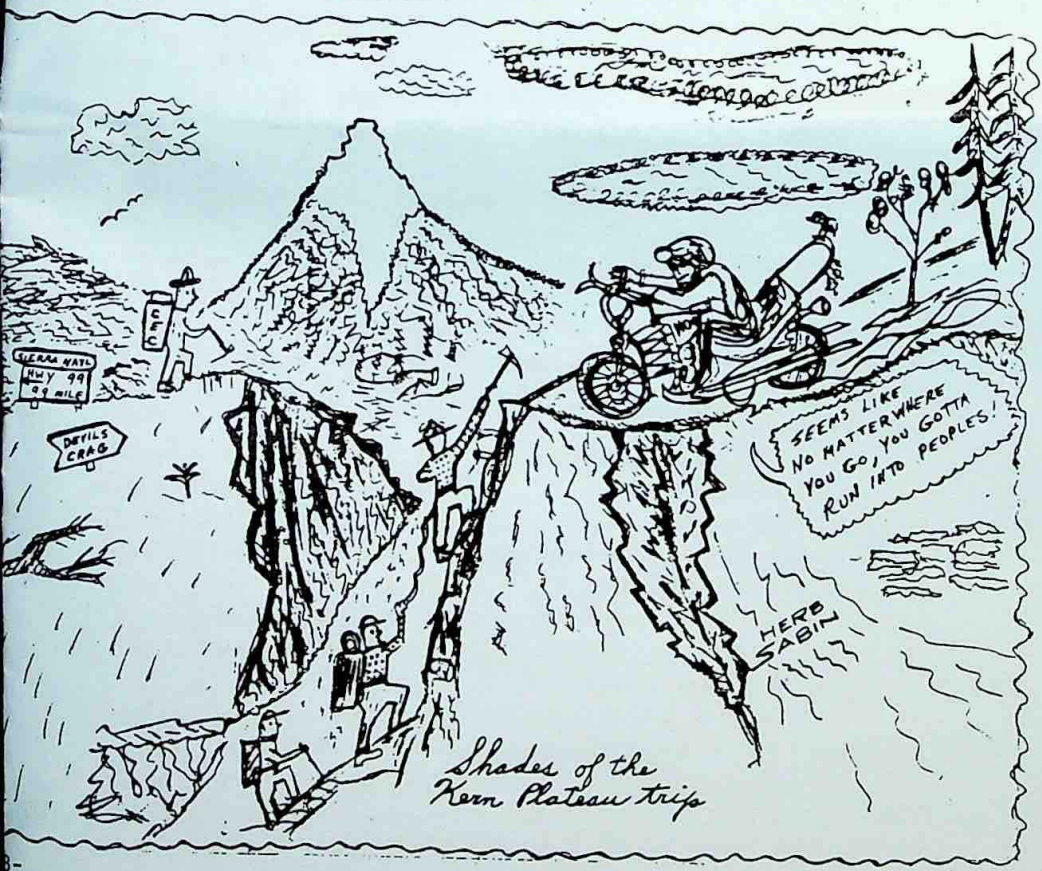
ALVIN No. 5505
Engineer's Computation Pad

El Picacho Del Diablo

-Henry-
8-24-'03



EL PICACHO DEL DIABLO
LED BY JOHN ROBINSON AND JAY WILEY,
NOV 25-28, 1971

El Picacho del Diablo, *the peak of the devil* -- This 10,000 foot peak located 100 miles south of the border in Baja is a most inaccessible peak. There are several routes thru the low lands, all long and arduous. The peak has been climbed by several routes, but in recent years one single best route has been chosen -- that being by way of Diablo Canyon, Camp Noche, Night Canyon, Slot Wash and Wall Street.

John Robinson, assisted by Jay Wiley agreed to lead this hike under the sponsorship of the Desert Peak Section of the Sierra Club. The Thanksgiving weekend of 1971 was chosen. John Robinson is a noted authority, he having written a book on that subject. Jay Wiley is a fine rock climber and mountaineer. He brought much strength to the leadership team. Jay was also very active in the Sierra Peaks Section.

The hikers, for this event, first met each other in a desolate camp site way down in Baja just off the approach road to the Diablo Canyon. A large number of cars had assembled here by morning. The car caravan departed the campground at 6:00 a.m. and drove through the Baja wilderness. Then we raced like Rommel's desert army across the absolutely flat seven-mile long oval shaped dry lake, meandering through a desert forest made up of ten-foot high mesquite, palos verde and a variety of phallus cactus. Near road's end we spied signs of human habitation-- corrals made from gnarled twisted sticks, plus a Mexican child or two. Al Campbell carried our salute to these Mexican friends in the form of a gallon of red wine and a bundle of old clothes.

All the cars found their favorite parking places beneath the mesquite trees, and all the people bounded out of the cars, jerked on hiking boots, readjusted packs and were ready to go.

John Robinson gave out some instructions and information, and then a party of 55 surged out on the sandy trail. A few late comers managed to miss the main party and started going up a wrong canyon. A sprinter dashed out to halt them, and to group them with the main party.

A mile of hiking brought us to a creek flowing over a jumble of rocks, and flanked by a broad sand plain devoid of any plant life. During the mile hike up this clear energetic stream, the canyon walls were seen to close in on us and the terrain to become more rugged, characterized by huge boulders.

As we came around the bend we viewed an awesome and enchanting scene. The canyon walls were smooth, vertical, white-gray monolithic rocks, sculpted and fluted. A beautiful symmetric water falls plummeted over the lip. This was twice as high as our heads. The water poured into a large pool below. This waterfalls is the main gate to the Diablo Canyon, -1-

and it stops all those but the few skillful enough to surmount this major obstacle. Our experienced rock climber skillfully and very deliberately performed the technical climb up the rock wall to gain the level of the falls, and the gateway structure on the left. Twenty feet higher than the falls he found a permanent anchor for a belay/rappel line. The rappel was rigged, allowing each person to wrap the double line through his crotch and over the left shoulder around the back to be grasped by the right hand.

Now by leaning back into the rope, and keeping one's feet perpendicular to the almost vertical rock face, one could friction walk the rock face, and thereby pendulum himself up to the level of the waterfall. Individual success depending upon each one screwing up his confidence, and then sallying forth quickly and determinedly on the high angle friction walk.

Two or more people lost friction and dignity at the crucial point at the lip of the falls, and spun out into ludicrous positions. Receivers at the falls were able to reach out and drag the unfortunates over the brink. Unfortunately, Lois Fracisco banged her ribs against the rock face, which pained her plenty, and the injury persisted for several days.

The whole operation of surmounting the falls took about three hours, due to the large party size, so we finally got to sit down to an overdue but very tasty lunch.

John Robinson, the troubadour and exponent of these mystic mountains, was in this, his beloved spectacular canyon. He dramatized the scene as he sat on a large boulder at a vantage point, and gazed off at the details of the horizon, as well as the canyon features far and near.

The party moves on through this beautiful but difficult canyon. The gods had carefully contrived a wide variety of clever obstacles, thus conning our individual skills. This surely was no place for Sunday strollers. The trip write-up had stated, "must be in top physical condition", which apparently everyone was. The eight or so ladies in the group seemed equal to the task. In most cases a husband or boy friend was nearby to help over truly difficult places, but in general these spunky gals made their own way, on a par with the men. It is always nice to have our Sierra Club gals with us to lend a little charm and gentility, and to allow the men opportunities of chivalry. The tales that these gals would carry back of their mountain climbing adventures, when related to flat-land delicate lady friends must seem absolutely inconceivable and incomprehensible to these demure creatures.

An hour after lunch we encountered a first serious obstacle, which seemed rather innocent at first glance, but which could deal an unpleasant surprise. This was a long slab friction walk, inclined about 45 degrees. How I wished I had new lugs, instead of well-rounded knobbies on my beat up hiking boots. A few took flying leaps off an adjacent boulder striving for enough inertia to carry them up to the first good toe hold.

This technique proved fool-hardy to one man who lost friction, thus sliding to the bottom where he suffered a sprained ankle, which necessitated him to abort the trip. Impressed with the danger of this place, I got out my thin nylon line , and using two strands, performed a belay to each person still coming up the slope. With this rope to hang onto, one could climb the slope easily.

Jay Wiley performed first aid to the man with the sprained ankle . A little later John Robinson came down trail to see about the injured man. The man, attended to by a teen aged son, felt too injured to continue the trip, and I believe made camp in the immediate vicinity. This was especially bad for the teen-aged son who must abort the trip to tend to his father. Three cheers for him. His opportunities will come another time. These are experiences that draw a father and son closer together.

Robinson had told the vanguard hikers to look for a place for our first night's camp site -- a fairly wide bench on the left side overlooking the river and studded with large boulders and desert bushes.

I had been at the very rear, first helping at the waterfall belay, and then the slab belay, so now felt that I must hurry to reach camp site by dusk. I set a good pace with long strides. The route continually changed from one side of the river to the other, across large and small rocks, over the top of rock rills and sand dunes. I hiked hard and fast, passing people in twos and threes. After much slogging I finally spied Harry Brumer at the camp site overlook. He was beckoning weary hikers to scoot up this incline, drop back packs and enjoy a pleasant camp. This camp was being staked out by the tigers of the party, but our slower buddies failed to appear, they having fallen short of this goal. Thus our camp was deprived of the company of the ladies. This rear guard formed a camp a mile below ours.

The five hippies, consisting of two teen-aged girls and three bearded fellows had set up camp in difficult headlands above us. They had selected this aerie in order to maintain separation and privacy to carry on their own exploits. Camping separately while on a Sierra Club event is an unapproved

practice, not contributing to the unanimity of the greater group and common good. I invaded their citadel for a brief visit. They were courteous and friendly, but were probably relieved when I left.

A good night's sleep under the brilliant heavens , and then we were up at the crack of dawn. A little time for dawdling before the rear guard came around the bend, they having hiked their mile. We fell in with them, but then one heavy set fellow from our camp announced that he would not be hiking with us any further, as he was suffering from a twisted knee.

The series of obstacles continued. We came to what I called The Needles Eye. The river was constrained to
a narrow canyon with almost vertical walls on both sides. This obstacle was surmounted by climbing steeply on the red stone bluffs, over tremendous boulders and squeezing through narrow slits, culminating in the needles eye at the apex. We emerged into a stand of level land scrub pine.

Now I was hiking alone, since I had been unduly delayed behind a slow hiker. I hastened to catch up with my compatriots who I had seen disappearing around the last bend. Now I hung a left hand turn, and was awed by the magnificent scene ahead, which turned out to be McLean Wash. This was a very high, 200 foot wide red colored rock cascade with white marbling streaks. A small stream was tumbling down the rock face over on the left hand side. I was amazed that the hikers preceding me could have scooted up this cascade that quickly, and dropped over the horizon. With gusto I charged up the steep red face looking for fissures for holds and toe holds. I got half way up the face, but then the face got steeper, and I ran out of toe holds, so that I suddenly lost my nerve and reconsidered.

I then attempted to climb a cruddy rough broken rock cliff on the left, but the rotten composition eventually frightened me , so I backed off. Comes the sudden realization that the party simply could not have come this way. Only fools would have attempted what I just had attempted. A little back tracking, and it becomes plainly obvious that the main canyon had swerved to the right and not to the left.

I fell in with the tail end of the main party. These people were doing the "Chocolate Brown Cliff" ledge, and were having a few trepidations. This obstacle would figure prominently on our return trip. I scoot around the deliberators. Hope they didn't think I was rude.

Now we were in a very broad, not very steep canyon, having two alternate stream channels with a fair amount of saplings and brush between them to confuse the trail. Another

canyon juncture, and we came upon a mass of people in relaxed attitudes enjoying rest and a lunch. I had pleasant conversation with John and Sherrie Minor, a young couple who seem to have recently discovered the joys of the wilderness and the mountains.

We move on due south up the canyon. No serious obstacles, but a constant scrambling over the big rocks in the river bed, and then up on the benches along the river through brush and boulders. and down to the river bed again. We are thankful for well placed ducks along the route, although they were not always there when you needed them.

Strangely, there is no stream in the canyon now. This gives us a serious worry that we may be headed into a dry camp. Now we come up a little knoll and find our hippy friends who are setting up camp at this point. They tell us that Camp Noche is just a five minute more walk, which proves to be correct. Again these people withdrew to their own separate camp.

Eagle Scouts had beat us to the prime camping location, but there were still plenty of spots to go around. Several camp fires sprung up, to mark areas of human comradeship and cheer. After a hearty supper, many of us gathered around the central fire to join in the droll, ribald wilderness stories.

Reveille at 5:00 a.m. so that we could hit the trail at 6:00. This is the big day, the day we are to bag that emblem of emblem peaks of the Desert Peak Section. Promptly the party falls in behind the leader, and single file we chug up the trail. This is quite uneventful, being much like so many other steep trails. After a couple of hours we reach a prominent overlook point studded by monumental sized rocks. John Robinson points out the canyon ledge complex where a young man with his girl companion became lost and marooned in 1967, and although separated from each other, each had survived a month's ordeal before being rescued by an intrepid and resourceful mountaineer.

It was at this rest stop that a bit of dissension broke out in our ranks. One mischievous, fun-loving character boldly baited the hippies by claiming that the hippies had defiled the place by strewing their orange peels around (when in reality one of our own square-heads had perpetrated this ignoble act). The hippies were indignant, quickly became overheated and made much to-do over this trifle. The tense situation persisted overly long time. The leader was probably not aware of such petty quibbling, but a firm dressing down would have been appropriate. Continuing up the trail, the pace seemed the same as before, but now individual differences show up, as certain persons began to flag badly. Jay

Wiley, the trail sweep, became alarmed at this situation, since the tail-end would lose sight of those ahead, thus become confused or even lost. At intervals Jay would shout angrily to "hold it up". A frequent regrouping was necessary to prevent the tail end from becoming completely severed.

Now John Robinson became a little confused regarding the correct wash to pursue. The surroundings were unfamiliar to John. Suddenly Dick Ramirez shouted out that he discovered the headstone and plaque of Joe Darrell. Here at 8000 feet lay Joe beneath the pine trees amongst the boulders in complete seclusion. Joe was a husky hiker on the 1967 Sierra Club hike. He inexplicably succumbed on the trail, from heart failure. This silent moment at your grave, Joe, is the only tribute we know to give you. You picked an exquisite place for your resting place, Joe.

Being at Joe's grave was proof that we were in the wrong wash, so now we dropped 200 feet, traversed to the left, picked up a ducked route and were on our way. We drop down into Slot Wash, cross it, up the other steep embankment, and then after a bit we enter Wall Street. This is a gorge with steep side walls and a steep though viable ever upward route. There is considerable falling rock danger, so we, the kicker loose of rocks , and you, who get rocks rained on your head, must both be very cautious.

Wall Street is very exhausting, as one uses arm muscles in addition to leg muscles, in unnatural positions, to pull oneself up the steep crevasses.

My endurance had been superb until the Wall Street stretch, but suddenly all my strength seemed to have ebbed awa and the main party is leaving me behind. So very, very tired or becomes from wrestling himself over yet another boulder. A wave despondency hits me and I mutter to myself, "What the h—— am doing up here anyhow. Is it worth it?" Avast! Do away with suc black thoughts. Be up and doing, and hie you up to the pinnacle.

Now a shout of triumph goes up, as the intrepid leader, climbs the highest rock, and stands on the pinnacle of **El Picacho del Diablo,** the peak of the devil. A swarm of people follow John over the jagged rocks and stake claims to the few sitable rocks. So, at last one attains the very last foot of the 10,154 foot peak , stands on the pinnacle rock and gazes over the whole mountain range. The long-range view is really not spectacular. The low mountain ranges go on and on, and lack any particular distinctiveness. There is really nothing in particular to focus one's eye on. Colors are dark, murky and brown.

Harry Brumer breaks out his triumphant beer (Mexican at that), holds it high and a few of us lucky guys get sips. But Harry firmly holds my elbow to prevent me from bending it too far. This

is undoubtedly the best beer I have ever tasted. With a full can of beer I could go into orbit. The peak lunches are always the most delicious, and one should be allowed an hour's nap afterwards, but peak time is all too short. Days are short and the trail is long. But first we all join in a full cheer for our grand old man of the mountains, Fred Bode, as he charges up to the very apex.

Fred Bode is 74 years old, hence the oldest ever to climb Picacho del Diablo. Fred climbs regularly, has done all the peaks on the Hundred Peaks List, and well on the way to wiping out the other lists. Fred is personable, a good trail companion, warm hearted, amiable and has a droll sense of humor. Besides this, he has a charming pretty wife.

The descent begins. Because of the falling rock danger on Wall Street, we are instructed to go down in small parties, and then wait for the next small group. The first wait-stop place is 500 feet below the peak. But the hippies and a few others have already charged ahead and divorced themselves from the party. This of course is contrary to the rules, for which one gets flunking marks. It is a long, long time before the party is reassembled . Down hill climbing is very different from the uphill go. Good uphillers may be fantastically slow on the down-hill plunges. I lie down and blissfully doze off while waiting. I hear conversations, but the muted voices are a buzz in a far off land and unreal.

We bound to our feet and spurt on down the trail. The great span of abilities becomes apparent again.
I don't want to hurry, but the hardies ahead of me are off in a cloud of dust. The pace is uncomfortable, and the space ahead of me widens. Josh is immediately behind me, and a gap opens up behind him. When I suggest to Josh that he is supposed to tarry until the next person can see where he is going, he objects saying that then he would lose the people ahead of him. Sensing a danger, I now rush to overtake those ahead. I rush down into Slot Wash, across it and see six hardies scooting across the opposite ridge. I shout, "Hold it up! Hold it up!" But now women behind me are screaming, "A man has fallen and is hurt". So, I tack this added info onto my message.

The advance party coasts to a halt, while I scoot down into the awesome Slot Wash and see that it is Ed Sweeting , a fine gentleman of 65 years who is groaning in the bottom of the deep V crevasse. His trousers are torn to tatters, but thank God his legs are still healthy. His injury consists of a dislocated shoulder and maybe a broken bone in that region. Jay Wiley at first doesn't even see us in this deep canyon, but then he dashes up, and unfurls an impressive first-aid kit. The dislocated shoulder should have been set, but this we did not do. Jay fashions an arm cradle, and then

I shinto off the backs of us bystanders to devise a sling. Ed

refuses codeine as a pain killer because of an allergy, but he takes Dervan. We lift Ed to his feet, and groom him with a goose-down jacket, as he must have been very cold and close to shock.

We proceed to walk Ed down the mountain for the comforts of Camp Noche.
A rear belayer keeps a rope tied around Ed's midriff taut, whenever we slide Ed off a big rock or down a steep slope. Receivers below would catch Ed to soften the shock. Scouters ahead would find the best route, and clear it of branches and rocks.

Ed was finally led into camp by moonlight. His sleeping bag had been arranged, so he was quickly tucked in. One lady served him hot soup to restore him.
The camp was agitated and distressed with this unfortunate accident. A caucus was called, the first part resembled a court of inquiry to determine what really did happen. Ed had lost sight of those ahead, and so had gotten off route, and must have thought we had gone down into Slot Wash at a precipitous place.

Next day Robinson asked for six volunteers to walk Ed out of the canyon in two days, while the rest of us would walk out in one day. We were asked to donate our extra food to sustain this splinter party. This next day, Sunday, we were up at five and on the trail by six under the leadership of Eric Schumacher and with Dick Akawie doing the trail sweep task. Many miles were to covered this day, so we moved along in good form. Several s regrouped the party

By 10:00 we had arrived at the chocolate brow ledge. The first few people walked this scary ledge w incident. Then it was Ed Crouse's turn. He was seized v panic, such that he could not bring himself to step out. scooted out besides Ed on even steeper rock, and he coached and coaxed Ed. Ed very slowly inched out and after a interminable five minutes arrived at the security of a flat area, where several others were watching and waiting. Then a ten-foot descent on chinks to another flat area, which would be like going down a step ladder. All my attention was riveted on every detail of the slope, but just a few cautious steps yielded the friendly plateau, where I arrived when just below me on the second level a tragedy was occurring. Poor Ed Crouse had tumbled off the chink steps, and was lying there groaning and moaning in his misery, and was holding his leg.

Another casualty! This time even more serious, for Ed Crouse claimed to have broken his leg. OH, NO! I felt a surge of anger and frustration, so walked away to contain and arrange my thoughts. I walked over to the magnificent McClean's

Wash even took a picture or two, and momentarily shut out of my mind this revolting turn of events. I reveled in the beauty of this spot and craved a continuation of absorption of such a primevil wilderness experience. Every other person seemed to be indulging in his own private rebellion, but poor Ed seemed to be quite alone on that cold stone, moaning. Poor Ed was lying out there on that cold rock in much pain.

A wave of shame passed over me, and I reluctantly strolled back to the victim. Bernie Pettijean had stepped forward as a self-appointed doctor. He splinted the whole leg using a part of a urethane foam pad (a sleeping pad) and willow sticks. This was tightly bound with nylon cord. Ed, in his agony, apologized for creating such a tremendous problem, and delaying us all. We tell him to shut up, as we are all responsible for each other, and we are here to help him to the best of our ability. Just by telling him this we have stepped into the snare, and are now committed to ensure Ed's well being.

A leader states that we will have to move Ed down canyon a-ways since this particular place is much too secluded and enclosed for any helicopter rescue. The leader states that we will need a few strong men to hustle Ed down canyon. The creek is lined with all uninvolved hikers who detachedly look on, wondering what will happen next. No one seems to be particularly interested in demonstrating prowess as a strong man, as there is no surge for first turn at hustling Ed.

Two of us, Roy I believe was his name, and I happen to be at Ed's side, so it looks like it's up to us. "C'mon. Ed, let's go", I say, and we lift Ed to his feet. He leans heavily on my shoulders as we hop him across the level spot to the big rock next to the creek. What a terrible thing to do, to ask a man with a broken leg to hike a mile through boulder land. We place Ed's rear end on the big rock, and Ed is breathing heavily . We swing Ed's legs over to the other side of the rock, and pause to consider what to do next.

A bright idea flashes into my mind - - Carry the man piggy back. I tell Ed to climb aboard. He objects strenuously saying that he is much too heavy for me to carry him. I persist, so he slides himself off the rock onto my back, and clutches me around the chest. The piggyback ride worked remarkably well. Ed was as comfortable as it was possible for him to be, and seemed immensely grateful for this mode of locomotion. I strode off with normal stride over the rocks, through the river and brush and wherever, until faced with a major obstruction too big to vault, so would set Ed down to regain myself. These stints were each about one-half city block long. In between piggy-backs Ed would hop assisted by a stalwart on either side. Ed of course was terribly

uncomfortable and very thirsty. Roy frequently fetched Ed a Sierra cup full of water.

Two men attempted to duplicate my piggy-back go, but neither could carry it off, one of them tumbling with poor Ed, much to his agony. Poor, poor Ed, we would sustain you gently, but we badly let you down.

Around the bend we come. The horizon widens, and we arrive at a wide area of a canyon junction, the chosen spot for a helicopter rescue. (This place became known as "Broken Leg Camp"). Ed was lowered down to his unfurled sleeping bag. So now, Ed, we must bid you adieu, hoping your rescue will come soon. Roy, Eric Schumacher and Joan Hack appointed themselves to stay with Ed, so the rest of us felt dismissed. But first we gave them all our remaining food.

It is now 1:00 pm, and we have many miles to go over many obstacles. Lo and Behold we now met Frank Reisley with son Mike, along with that very fine lad Dan Austin! These three had also climed El Picacho del Diablo the same day we did, but by a different route. Dan Austin and Mike are now given the job of being leaders and route finders. Dick Akawie continued to b trail sweep. Frank Reisley kept him company. Daylight ende but we were blessed with a half-moon. Dan and Mike di splendid job of finding the very best route. The obstacles easier going downhill, as one could lower himself down difficult place. Each of us was especially on guard ag insidious dangers. No one wanted to be the next casualty.

Then it was the waterfalls again. The Australian, mentioned before, set up the pendulum rappel, and did a magnificent job. Through no fault of his, only one man was dropped into the pool. What a resounding splash I heard while I was waiting up canyon. Fred Bode had a bit of trouble. He launched with perfect form but he upset near the end of the pendulum, so that we had to pull him infor a safe landing.

Then a very long walk through the desert under the bright moon. An earlier group from our party had become lost in the desert, so were thankful for our haloos, to regain their sense of destination. The cars were so very welcome. Good vittels in the car gave us a pickup before our return to the U.S.A.

and H O M E.

My knowledge of the rescue is skimpy. The Ed Sweeting rescue came around the bend at 3:00 pm and were dismayed to find a man with a broken leg to compound their problems. This ended

their hike-out plans, and now all they could do is wait for rescuers. Sunday a violent wind came up making camp fires impossible. Monday they built a helicopter pad and waited for the big bird.

Monday a rescue party was in effect, but badly coordinated. They lacked definition as to just where the casualties were located. Those in the canyon were chagrined to see the helicopter hovering and then fly off, not being seen by him.

Tuesday the rescue was effected, and the two were flown to a hospital in San Diego. The families picked up the two Eds a day or two later and brought them home. Sweeting improved splendidly, but Ed Crouse's broken leg was more serious. A total cast was required, and the swelling gave Ed lots of misery.

But, Ed, undoubtedly we'll see you on the trail one of these days.

file: Sierra Club - 10 pages recaptured Aug 7, 2001

- *Henry* - -page 10 of 10

cc: HA, DG, WH, FH, ROG, HJR, EC, CC,, NN, BT, PT, JR,, JW, B+RW,,RW, G+RH. ,Eug, SZ,

This account tendered to about 50 people at the **Bruce Trotter** party, Aug 24, 2003, **namely:**

Ahrens Jim: Bly, Naomi; Box, June; Childers, Jackie; Darringer, Michelle; Dunbreck, Dave; Ellis, Frank; Evans, Christie; Edna Erspamer; Fox, Anne; Farfan, Betty; Geiger, Bruno + Ingeborg; Gittleson, Barry; Gray, Bill; Hayden, Keats: Greenawalt, Bob: Heusinkveld, Henry; Hollowell, Aileen; Johnson, Dick; Jones, Betty; Kalvinskas, Louanne; Keeting, Jerry + Nancy; Krang, Betty; Lange, Will; Levitts, Mitch; Marvosh, Maria: Miller, Dick: Nettleship, Ingrid: Payette, Marylin; Pearce, Konrad + Debra; Rehberg, G; Ripley, Rip+ Nancy; Robinson, John; Schumaker, Carol; Sheehan, Dave: Sui, Marian; **Trotter, Bruce**; Veelik, Dan; Weir, Dian; Woodward, Lucy: